

Iran warns U.S. actions over Venezuela fuel shipments will not go unanswered



Tehran, May 16 (RHC)-- Iran has warned the U.S. against taking action against several Iranian-flagged tankers transporting fuel to Venezuela, as Washington has threatened.

"If the United States, just like pirates, intends to create insecurity on international waterways, it would be taking a dangerous risk and that will certainly not go without repercussion," Iran's Nour News Agency said on Friday, citing reports that U.S. warships were en route to intercept the tankers in the Caribbean.

On Thursday, an unnamed US official told Reuters the Trump administration was considering possible actions against the tanker shipments.

"It is not only unwelcome by the United States but it's unwelcome by the region, and we're looking at measures that can be taken," the official said, who indicated Washington believed with a "high degree of certainty" Caracas intended to pay for the fuel with gold. Iranian Ambassador to Venezuela Hojjatollah Soltani has explicitly denied the accusation.

Earlier on Friday, the U.S. Navy's Twitter account shared photos of four U.S. warships -- three guided-missile destroyers and a littoral combat ship -- on patrol in the Caribbean. It was the second such tweet this week, with another on Wednesday including a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

?According to reports, five tankers sailing under the Iranian flag are transporting refined fuel to Venezuela, where more than a year's worth of siege by the United States has strangled the Venezuelan economy, blocking importation of parts necessary to keep industries running. As a result, in January, the country was forced to shut down its last oil refinery, meaning that although its primary export is petroleum, Venezuela is now experiencing a fuel shortage.

Following reports of potential U.S. actions against the shipment, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza denounced the prospective actions on Twitter as "more evidence for the world that we will send to the International Criminal Court." He continued: "Against the background of the pandemic, Washington is tracing ships that transport our oil and carry fuel. This is a gross violation of international law and of the fundamental rights of Venezuelans."

Last month, Tehran received significant verbal attacks from the U.S. for helping Caracas restart its broken catalytic cracking unit at the huge Cardon refinery, a necessary step in the refinement of crude oil into the variety of fuels that can be made from it.

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